



Secretary's Taskforce on the Employment and Advancement of Women in the Department of Veterans Affairs

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On October 2, 2002, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs met with 28 women at the GS-14 and above grade levels. Also at the meeting were the Chief of Staff and the Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration. The meeting focused on discussing concerns regarding the employment, training, and advancement of women. During the discussion, the group shared concerns and suggestions with the Secretary on the following issues:

- ◆ Improve the representation of women in management and other senior level positions.
- ◆ Expand the Women's Executive Leadership Forum to field facilities.
- ◆ Ensure that managers and supervisors are held accountable for diversity.
- ◆ Ensure that women have a meaningful and decisive role on committees, task forces, ad hoc groups, etc.
- ◆ Ensure the assignment of meaningful, decision-making roles rather than work that is purely task-oriented.
- ◆ Recognize women at the higher levels with presidential rank awards, bonuses, and special contribution awards.
- ◆ Conduct focus groups and surveys Departmentwide to identify barriers to women.
- ◆ Provide knowledge-networking training on issues that affect women in the workforce.
- ◆ Provide better educational and leadership development opportunities.
- ◆ Develop and implement career-enhancing mentoring programs.
- ◆ Hire more women interns and ensure a flexible hiring system.
- ◆ Clearly define career paths.

- ◆ Establish a Secretary's Advisory Council on Diversity.
- ◆ Appoint RNs to task forces, committees, and health care groups to ensure they have a voice.
- ◆ Make sure there is pay equity and equal treatment when converting Title 38 nurses to Title 5 executive positions.
- ◆ Develop a sensitivity program for managers on pregnancy and other issues unique to women.
- ◆ Ensure ongoing family-friendly programs.
- ◆ Increase on-site daycare programs.
- ◆ Support external women's groups, e.g., Federally Employed Women.

In response to the feedback he received during the meeting, the Secretary directed the establishment of a **Secretary's Task Force on the Employment and Advancement of Women** to develop a comprehensive plan that would correct the imbalances.

The Secretary mandated the following:

- Expand the Women's Executive Leadership Forum to include field facilities.
- Obtain information from other agencies and the private sector on best practices.
- Work with professional organizations—Executive Women in Government, Federally Employed Women, National Association of Female Executives, and others—to enhance VA's ability to recruit and retain highly skilled women and prepare them to become future VA executives.
- Identify strategies to recognize and publicize the accomplishments of women in government.

On October 24, 2002, the Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration asked Departmental senior level officials to nominate participants for the Secretary's Task Force. In December, the Task Force met in Washington, DC, to begin its work and identified the following major categories that the comprehensive plan would address:

- Current Situation
- Data Collection and Analysis
- Business Case
- Implementation Plan linked to the Department's Strategic Plan

The Task Force collected and analyzed voluminous data and obtained feedback regarding its efforts from a variety of sources.

To ensure consistency with the Secretary's mandate, Task Force members briefed the Chief of Staff on its plan. After receiving approval, the Task Force met in January 2003 in Baltimore, MD, to develop the draft report and refine data collection efforts to ensure accuracy, validity, and relevancy to VA.

In keeping with the Secretary's expressed desire that the Task Force conduct focus groups as part of its deliberations, in March 2003, an independent contractor conducted focus groups in Los Angeles, California; New York, New York; Washington, DC; and Little Rock, Arkansas. The Task Force selected these cities to ensure representation, to include men and women, from as many Departmental organizational elements as possible. The focus group results validated the concerns raised to the Secretary during the October 2, 2002, meeting and further assisted the Task Force in developing strategies for success.

This report details the Task Force's efforts. The members have worked diligently against a tight deadline to thoroughly assess VA's current situation and outline strategies that will bring about meaningful change. These strategies establish a foundation of effective processes that will serve to institutionalize diversity as an integral part of VA's framework, now and in the future.

The Task Force report provides meaningful and effective strategies for success that are feasible, cost effective, cross-functional to other minority groups, and linked to VA's organizational goals and objectives. Implementing these strategies will produce measurable improvements and achievable results by December 2004.

The report contains five major components:

Notable Accomplishments

Current Situation

Business Case and Best Practices

Strategic Implementation Plan: *Strategies for Success*

Summary

In the end, the Department's success or failure in fulfilling its mission will depend on the willingness of each supervisor, manager, and executive to lead with integrity and to demonstrate a commitment to an environment that truly recognizes, trains, and promotes women. Only when new levels of responsibility and accountability are achieved will VA move from our current position—last among all of the cabinet level agencies for women above grade GS-13—to a position of leadership in diversity excellence.



NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Since the appointment of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs in 2001, several notable accomplishments are worthy of mention:

- There has been increased scrutiny of nominations for key leadership positions to ensure that women are receiving fair and equitable consideration.
- The Senior Executive Service (SES) Candidate Development Program selected 9 women out of a total of 16 candidates.
- A number of women have been appointed to positions with significant leadership responsibilities including: (a) Chief of Staff; (b) Director, Center for Women Veterans; (c) Deputy Assistant Secretary for Budget; (d) Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations & Management; (e) Associate Deputy Under Secretary for Management (VBA); and (f) Chief of Staff for VBA.
- The number of women nominated for the Presidential Rank Awards increased from one in 2001 to five in 2002.
- The representation of women in the SES corps increased from 15.2 percent in 2001 to 17.2 percent in 2002.

- The nomination of women for Presidential appointments.
- The selection of women for Deputy Assistant Secretary positions in the Department.





CURRENT SITUATION

The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission — Title II of the Civil Rights Act of 1991 created the 21-member, bipartisan Federal Glass Ceiling Commission to study the barriers to the advancement of women and minorities within corporate hierarchies. The Commission undertook an extensive research and information gathering effort including public hearings, surveys of chief executive officers, and interviews with focus groups. This work culminated in the spring 1995 release of the Commission's report, "Good For Business: Making Full Use of the Nation's Human Capital." In November 1995, the Commission released its recommendations in "A Solid Investment: Making Full Use of the Nation's Human Capital." The Commission found that diversity is good for business and noted a 1993 study of Standard and Poor 500 companies, which showed that stocks of companies that succeed in shattering their own glass ceilings outpaced their competitors by nearly 250 percent.

On the other hand, the Commission found serious barriers to advancement: persistent stereotyping, erroneous beliefs that no qualified women or minorities are available, and fear of change. It then identified some of the factors common to successful corporate initiatives—including high-level commitment, leadership, and corporate-wide accountability.

The Dingell/Maloney report, published by Federally Employed Women News and Views in July 2002, puts in writing what women have long suspected. Women are underrepresented in senior management positions in virtually every professional field.

Further, although women have made steady improvements in the workplace, earning 76 cents for every dollar that a man takes home, the data clearly shows that progress is stalled for women in management positions.

Maloney states, "True parity in the workplace remains a distant promise rather than a coming reality." Maloney believes that a long-term cure is needed and partnered with Dingell to reintroduce the Equal Rights Amendment. Dingell states, "There is compelling evidence that the glass ceiling remains a powerful obstacle to women in the workforce, and it suggests things may be getting worse, not better."

Women represent nearly 61percent of VA's workforce, but only 37percent of those at the GS-13 and above grade levels are women.

Table A – Title 5 and Senior Executive Service Employees

Grade Level	All Employees	Women	Percentage of Women
GS-12 and below	123,079	77,931	63.32%
GS-13	8,263	3,381	40.92%
GS-14	2,700	929	34.41%
GS-15	881	226	25.65%
SES	302	52	17.22%
Total	135,225	82,519	61.02%

Table B – Title 38 Employees

Grade Level	All Employees	Women	Percentage of Women
12 and below	62,206	52,720	84.75%
13	10,510	8,882	84.51%
14	1,495	881	58.93%
15	14,187	3,723	26.24%
Above 15	191	24	12.57%
Total	88,589	66,230	74.76%

Table C - Federal Wage System

Type	All Employees	Women	Percentage of Women
Hourly Employees	25,545	5,560	21.77%
Hourly Supervisors	2,029	378	18.63%
Hourly Leaders	1,152	141	12.24%
Total	28,726	6,079	21.16%

Where are the women? Women hold the majority of the following types of positions in VA:

Secretary and clerical positions, telephone operator, financial and accounting technicians, teller, voucher examiner, pay technician, dietitian, occupational therapist, physical therapist, therapy assistant, vocational rehabilitation counselor, social worker, human resources specialist, human resources assistant, equal employment specialist, medical administration specialist, staff assistant, patient services assistant, budget analyst, insurance service technician, health aide, medical technologist, pharmacy technician, audiologist, librarian, medical records technician, dental assistant, legal assistant, claims assistant, public affairs specialist, contract specialist, procurement analyst, loan specialist, statistician, education officer, training specialist, education and training technician, and transportation assistant.

While this list is not all-inclusive, the occupations held by women in VA appear to be predominantly “technician,” “clerk,” or “assistant.” Conversely, males hold an overwhelming majority of management positions including:

Assistant center director, program management officer, memorial service network director, director office of information systems, domiciliary officer, program manager, management analysis officer, telecommunications manager, biologist researcher, physiologist, pharmacologist, assistant financial officer, deputy director finance service, fiscal administration health science officer, supervisory rehab therapist, pharmacist, audiologist, orthotist, health systems specialist director, biomedical engineer and technician, engineering technician, electrical engineer, computer engineer, decision review officer, attorney-advisor, veterans service representative, photographer, acquisition and material management officer, health systems acquisition manager, appraiser, chief appraiser, chemist, cemetery administrator, field examiner, supply information technology specialist, psychologist, assistant human resources officer.

SES REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN VA COMPARED TO OTHER AGENCIES

Table D

AGENCY	Total Number of SES staff	# of SES Women	Female Percentage of SES Staff
<i>HUD</i>	85	31	36.5
<i>HHS</i>	407	146	35.9
<i>SSA</i>	119	41	34.5
<i>EPA</i>	268	91	34.0
<i>Interior</i>	216	71	32.9
<i>NSF</i>	82	26	31.7
<i>Education</i>	78	24	30.8
<i>Other Agencies</i>	731	220	30.1
<i>Labor</i>	159	47	29.6
<i>GSA</i>	93	25	26.9
<i>Agriculture</i>	305	82	26.8
<i>Transportation</i>	211	56	26.5
<i>Commerce</i>	351	90	25.8
<i>Treasury</i>	602	153	25.7
<i>Justice</i>	373	89	23.9
<i>NASA</i>	370	72	19.5
<i>Energy</i>	414	73	17.6
<i>Defense</i>	1199	203	16.9
<i>NRC</i>	146	22	15.1
VA	282	41	14.5
TOTAL Federal Government Agencies	6491	1603	26.8

Source: General Accounting Office (GAO) report, "Enhanced Agency Efforts Needed to Improve Diversity as the Senior Corps Turns Over," released in February 2003.

GAO used data from previous fiscal years. As of April 1, 2003, in VA, the representation of women at the SES level is 17.2 percent.

Education and training programs specifically designed to bring more women into the higher grade levels, along with careful Departmentwide planning and targeted recruitment efforts, will provide significant gains in the percentage of women in Grade-13, Grade-14, Grade-15, and SES positions. To achieve diversity goals, training and leadership development opportunities need to be widely marketed and accessible to employees, regardless of where they reside in the organization. The success of this effort will depend on the creation of a comprehensive, organization-wide leadership and management development strategy.

VA training policy has not changed substantially for more than 20 years. The policy delegates responsibility and authority for training to leaders at the Administration and Staff Office levels. While this has resulted in a variety of effective Administration-level executive development programs, there are no Departmentwide standards or curriculum requirements for training and development of supervisors, managers, and executives, or for candidates for those positions.

Feeder Programs — Access to supervisory and management development programs are critical to develop a sufficient cadre of women professionals qualified to apply for VA's executive development programs. A recent OPM study, "Supervisors in the Federal Government: A Wake-up Call," assesses governmentwide efforts to identify, select, develop, and evaluate first-line supervisors. OPM found that (1) agencies need to do a better job of selecting and developing first-level supervisors; (2) most agencies still do not identify employees with supervisory potential and develop them for future leadership positions; and (3) supervisors believe that leadership development is given a low priority. While VA was not surveyed for this study, there is no reason to believe that these findings would be substantially different in VA.

Both Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and Veterans Health Administration (VHA) have stratified (by grade bands) leadership training programs to meet specific needs; however, this approach does not currently apply across the Department. For example, capacity is an ongoing problem. Staff Office needs are traditionally met through external or corporate training sources when funding is available, and supervisory skills training programs across the Department are not organized as they are in the two Administrations.

Tracking Progress — VA Learning University (VALU) efforts are now underway to implement an enterprise-level learning management system (LMS) that will track training opportunities, training hours, and training expenditures across the Department. The LMS will also prepare reports on training by the trainees, and will roll-up reports by office, facility, Administration, and Departmentwide. An LMS that includes the ability to provide data regarding career development of women

and minorities is critical to plan and achieve needed workforce diversity within VA's executive leadership ranks.

Our efforts to obtain information regarding women applicants and participants in these training programs validated that no data is systematically collected to track the number of women applicants, repeat applicants, or participants.

Based on focus groups and other feedback from men and women across the Department, the following common trends emerged:

- Lack of cohesive leadership development programs across the Department
- Lack of supervisory and managerial sensitivity to women, including inequity in treatment, training, recognition, and assignment of work
- Failure to promote family-friendly programs consistent with those offered by other agencies
- Lack of the availability of childcare during shift working schedules.
- Lack of managerial accountability and responsibility for diversity
- Unwritten higher standard for women
- Lack of women in senior leadership positions

The Task Force report contains strategies to address these common concerns and others that require action.

The Department has undertaken several different studies relating to the employment and advancement of women, minorities, and persons with disabilities. In February 2001, VBA completed a diversity report containing four goals. VBA's goals complement those developed by the Task Force. VHA developed many different initiatives, through its diversity board, designed to correct workforce imbalances. The Task Force considered and incorporated these initiatives in the strategic implementation plan of this report. While these individual organization efforts will assist in moving the Department forward, VA lacks a corporate diversity model of excellence. This report provides the framework for such a model.

BUSINESS CASE AND BEST PRACTICES



In fulfilling its mission to care for veterans and their families, VA is committed to recruiting, training, and maintaining a highly skilled and diverse workforce. Evidence of this commitment is found in VA's core values, strategic plan, and response to the Human Capital requirements of the President's Management Agenda. Creating an organizational climate that respects and values diversity is a business imperative crucial to the continued success of the Department.

Being an Employer of Choice means that the organization provides an environment where prospective recruits can expect career development opportunities, irrespective of gender, ethnic, cultural, or work-style difference. It means fostering an organizational culture that focuses on performance rather than style, and an organizational leadership that has learned to recognize and develop the talents of the variety of people who comprise the workforce.

The Task Force gathered data from a variety of public and private sources, obtained information from a select number of field facilities, conducted informal discussions with women, and obtained information from companies recognized as leaders in the advancement of women. Successful organizations cited the following as critical factors: leadership and management commitment, employee involvement, strategic planning, sustained investment, diversity indicators, accountability, and linkage to organizational goals and objectives.

Although women represent 61 percent of VA's current workforce, they are not reaching the higher grade levels in numbers that reflect their presence. In an effort to identify the practices adopted by successful organizations to improve diversity in leadership positions, the Task Force team contacted other Federal agencies; studied the diversity programs of private companies; interviewed leaders; and reviewed the National Partnership for Reinventing Government Benchmarking Study on best practices in achieving workforce diversity.

Social Security Administration (SSA) ranks third in Government with 41 women (34.5 percent) in SES positions (Table D). The Commissioner is committed to diversity throughout the organization and has demonstrated this commitment by making diversity a topic of discussion at executive level meetings. SSA has made a strong business case for diversity by tying it to organizational performance. The SSA Strategic Plan reflects the organization's "Nike Plan" approach to diversity in the workforce—"Just Do It."

Department of Interior (DOI) was identified by VHA's Diversity Advisory Board as one of the Federal Government agencies that has been very proactive for the last few years in the quest to improve diversity in its workforce. The Department created a Task Force, comprised of representatives from all the Bureaus in the Department and the DOI Diversity Council, to develop a Strategic Plan. The Task Force focused on strategic planning for a diverse workforce. The success of the DOI Strategic Plan—targeting recruitment, retention, and quality of work life for employees, and accountability—is reflected in the 71 women (33 percent) in the SES ranks (Table D).

The U.S. Coast Guard (CG), the only Government agency selected as a participant in the National Partnership for Reinventing Government Benchmarking Study, has been recognized for its proactive approach to improving diversity within the organization. A primary goal of the USCG Commandant is to be a leader in developing a diverse workforce. As with most Federal agencies, and particularly military organizations, recruiting minorities and women has been a crucial aspect of CG's management issues. CG has enjoyed success in its efforts to recruit, but retention has proven to be a greater challenge. With this as its motivation, CG created a team to prepare the "Diversity as a Process" study to examine diversity and its benefits. The study became the basis for a Cultural Audit, which defined the barriers preventing CG from being an Employer of Choice.

The results of the Cultural Audit were used to develop an implementation plan that included the following actions:

- Obtaining full commitment from the Commandant.
- Establishing a Diversity Staff: a staff of eight advisors who conduct awareness training, social climate intervention, and analysis and policy formulation. They meet with and advise senior leaders on a regular basis.
- Developing a Business Plan that includes diversity goals.
- Creating a Diversity Advisory Council.
- Building leadership competencies, including the spirit and intent of diversity as an integral part of performance evaluations for senior leaders.

Sempra Energy is a 100-year-old, California-based Fortune 500 company. The company has the largest utility customer base in the United States and a growing international presence. Sempra has received numerous awards—including the Department of Labor’s “Exemplary Voluntary Efforts Award”—and is cited as one of the benchmarking partners in the National Partnership for Reinventing Government’s Benchmarking Study. For the past 3 years, the company was selected as one of *Fortune* magazine’s “Top 5 Best Places to Work for Minorities.”

Sempra’s diversity program is 11 years old. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) created an Office of Corporate Diversity Affairs to give the diversity effort the resources, accountability, and visibility needed to be successful.

The CEO has made diversity a priority for all levels of management by approving performance standards that reflect commitment and accountability; tying incentives and compensation to success in achieving diversity goals; and reinforcing goals and expectations through diversity and awareness training for executives, managers, and supervisors.

This effort has resulted in a workforce of 11,500 employees, with women holding 22 percent of the executive and management level positions. The Board of Directors is 50 percent minority and women.

The Director of Corporate Diversity Affairs shared her prescription for continued success:

- CEO must demonstrate total commitment in word and deed
- Communicate goals and successes
- Reward successes
- Create ways to keep the diversity program in the forefront

International Business Machines (IBM), with 304,000 employees worldwide, has recognized the value of a diverse workforce. IBM regards diversity as a component of each manager's personal business plan.

During annual performance reports, managers must cite the percentage of minorities, including women, in their organizations. Further, all regional managers must provide diversity updates to the IBM executive responsible for diversity within the company. The CEO insists that executives pay attention to this issue. In addition, every promotion referral list must include at a minimum, one woman and one minority. Once women are selected for executive and other management development programs, they are placed in structured mentoring programs.

Additionally, 40 top executives in IBM's "Worldwide Management Council" serve as diversity partners with the various task force groups to make sure that diversity initiatives get through the system. IBM also has numerous policies and programs that improve the quality of work life for women including childcare initiatives, compressed workweeks, and job sharing.

AETNA, a major insurance provider, is consistently listed as a top company for women executives. Of AETNA's 37,000 employees, 70 percent are women. Women hold 57 percent of the management positions and 22 percent of the senior management positions. Three out of 14 (21 percent) of the company's Executive Council are women.

AETNA's commitment to diversity comes from the top. The Vice President for the Office of Diversity says that diversity is the cornerstone of the company's strength: "Savvy business leaders respect the value of employing a diverse population," which expands the company's collective perspective and "better equips the company to understand and respond to customers' needs."

AETNA has instituted various programs to improve the percentage of women in senior management positions. Internal surveys of executive women are performed to identify obstacles to advancement.

The company has Women Networks in various locations across the country, where women get together in small groups to interact with senior management. In 2000 and 2001, AETNA brought in about 150 women to Executive Women Conferences, featuring women speakers who hold high-level management positions.

Each of the company's leaders completed a Diversity Scorecard describing the initiatives in their departments. Bonuses were awarded to some of the managers for their efforts. Flexible work arrangements—such as job sharing, compressed work weeks, variable schedules, and telecommuting—have also helped AETNA attract and retain highly skilled women.

National Partnership for Reinventing Government Benchmarking Study —

The U.S. Department of Commerce and the National Partnership for Reinventing (NPR) Government sponsored a benchmarking study—published on the NPR Web site in September 2000—to identify the best practices in achieving workforce diversity in both private and public organizations. The NPR study included a review of a wide range of diversity literature and recognized over 600 private and public organizations for their efforts in achieving workforce diversity. Through an additional screening process, the study team identified nine organizations whose exemplary practices in achieving workforce diversity were truly “world class,” based on the identified critical success factors below:

- Leadership and Management Commitment
- Employee Involvement
- Strategic Planning
- Sustained Investment
- Diversity Indicators
- Accountability Measurement and Evaluation
- Linkage to Organizational Goals and Objectives

The nine organizations selected were Coors Brewing Co., Daimler/Chrysler, Eastman Kodak, Fannie Mae, The Prudential Insurance Co., The Seattle Times, Sempra Energy, United States Coast Guard, and Xerox. The study focused on the best practices of successful organizations:

- **Organizations Benefit from Diversity.** Organizations that promote and achieve a diverse workplace will attract and retain quality employees and increase customer satisfaction.

- **Leaders and Managers are Responsible for Diversity.** Leaders and managers within organizations are primarily responsible for the success of diversity policies because they must ensure that the policies work. Success depends on leaders who are actively involved in implementing initiatives and risk taking.
- **Leaders and Managers Must Create a Strategic Plan to Develop Diversity Initiatives throughout the Organization.** Leaders and managers must incorporate diversity policies into every aspect of the organization's functions and purposes. There must be a clear focus on creating measurable ways diversity can support the strategic direction, goals, and objectives of the organization. Accountability is key.
- **Employee Views and Involvement Are Critical to the Success of Diversity Initiatives.** Organizations must view employee participation as an essential part of promoting diversity policies. The leaders of the best practice organizations understand that they must support their employees in learning how to interact with and manage people in a diverse workplace.

DiversityInc maintains a team of experienced journalists whose articles on diversity management—including best practices, emerging markets, recruitment and retention, leadership, and legal issues—appear in the company's magazine, *DiversityInc*, and online (*DiversityInc.com*). The company, which also published the original "Business Case for Diversity," a 328-page foundational document, features a large diversity career center on its Web site. The article, "Retention and Supplier Diversity: What Makes a Top Company for Diversity," highlighted several successful companies and some of their best practices:

At **Johnson & Johnson**, 300 women employees set the course for creating a working environment that supported their professional growth by forming the Women's Leadership Initiative in 1995 and calling for a meeting with top management to discuss their concerns. The initiative resulted in the creation of a strong educational component for women employees, partnering them with senior executives. By 2000, there were 900 executive women at Johnson & Johnson. Currently, the company reports 36.6 percent of management employees are women.

Prudential, the number one U.S. life insurer and number four on *DiversityInc's* "Top 50 Companies for Diversity," has developed an unusual form of sensitivity training. The company partners leaders with mentors who are different from them, then measures how managers and senior executives integrate diversity into their staff-meeting agendas and public-speaking engagements.

Verizon decided to offer its leadership bonuses of 5 percent to meet goals in diversity recruitment, retention, and promotion. To ensure that people being promoted are qualified for their increased responsibilities, the company requires every person who is a director or above to mentor at least two people.

The Chicago Area Partnerships (CAPS)—an organizational model comprised of community, government, and corporate representatives—was created in 1992 to discuss and provide leadership on workplace issues. The CAPS 1996 report, “Pathways and Progress: Corporate Best Practices to Shatter the Glass Ceiling,” begins by defining the glass ceiling as “artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational biases that prevent qualified women and minorities from advancing upward into management-level positions. The glass ceiling is comprised of day-to-day practices, management and employee attitudes, and internal systems that operate to the career disadvantage of women and minorities.”

The report identified the following artificial barriers that contribute to maintaining the glass ceiling:

- Methods of recruitment
- Fewer developmental opportunities for women and minorities
- Lack of corporate ownership for equal employment opportunity
- Responsibility delegated to just one person
- Inadequate record keeping
- Poor career planning and development
- Unsupportive work environment
- Inability to get feedback
- Unequal pay
- Exclusion of women and minorities from the “inner sanctum” of senior management—even if they break through a lower glass ceiling
- Different standards of performance for women and minorities and white men
- People more comfortable dealing with “their own kind”
-

The report recommended that to effect real change, leaders must:

- Identify aspects of the corporate culture and environment that are barriers to retaining and advancing women and minorities;
- Develop and communicate throughout the organization the business case for retaining and advancing women and minorities;
- Promote zero tolerance policies for discrimination of any form, in compliance with Federal law; and
- Have the will to act.





STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION PLAN:

FOR SUCCESS

The Task Force recommended the implementation of three key initiatives:

- ❖ 1. Establish a Secretary's Advisory Council on Diversity—comprised of industry experts and VA officials—to advise and monitor the progress of programs and strategies necessary to attract, train, retain, and advance women.
- 2. Brief the Department's most senior managers on the Task Force report, including the feedback from focus groups.
- 3. Incorporate the strategies for success into the Department's Strategic Plan and hold organizations accountable for results.

After gathering and analyzing data and best practices used by organizations recognized for excellence in the employment and advancement of women, the Task Force developed three strategic goals related to the Department's enabling goal: "Deliver world-class service to veterans and their families by applying sound business principles that result in effective management of people, communications, technology, and governance."

Each of the three goals includes specific and measurable objectives:

- 1. Increase internal and external recruitment and retention programs designed to attract and promote women.
- 2. Develop and enhance education and training programs designed to advance women.
- 3. Foster a corporate culture that proactively integrates women into GS-13, GS-14, GS-15, and Senior Executive Service positions.

The following tables reflect the objectives under each initiative, along with the responsible organization and a due date for accomplishment.

GOAL 1: INCREASE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION PROGRAMS DESIGNED TO ATTRACT AND PROMOTE WOMEN.

STRATEGY	RESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATION	DUE DATE
Ensure that the advancement of women in the Senior Executive Service meets or exceeds the Government average (26 percent).	All Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and key officials	Continuous
Ensure that women are proportionately represented in high level awards such as bonuses, rank awards, external awards, and special contribution awards.	All VA Performance Review Boards and senior officials	Continuous
Simplify rules and regulations governing hiring and compensation.	OHRM	Continuous
Estimate the number of leadership position vacancies anticipated during the next 2 years. Through a continuous, focused outreach to women—both within and outside VA—identify ways these positions might provide valuable experience to female candidates, either as temporary or permanent assignments.	Office of Workforce Planning	April 2003
Partner with professional organizations—Executive Women in Government, Federally Employed Women, National Association of Female Executives, and others—to enhance VA's ability to recruit and retain highly skilled and qualified women and prepare them to become future VA executives.	Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration	July 2003
Conduct benchmarking and assess best practices from internal and external programs that will improve the recruitment, employment, and development of women employees.	Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration	July 2003
Finalize standardized entrance and exit interview processes for use throughout VA, with an electronic storage capability to tabulate and summarize results. This tool will assess the reasons women leave VA employment.	Office of Workforce Planning	August 2003
Review, implement, and communicate family-friendly programs to include childcare centers.	OHRM	November 2003
Conduct a study to determine if there are pay inequities in transitioning from Title 38 to Title 5 executive positions.	VHA, OHRM, and the Commission on Nursing	April 2004
Develop a robust corporate repository that captures race, gender, and disability data on applicants for employment, training, and career progression. Use that data and equivalent internal data to monitor and evaluate the selection process to ensure outreach to qualified women candidates.	OHRM	June 2004

GOAL 2: DEVELOP AND ENHANCE TRAINING AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS DESIGNED TO ADVANCE WOMEN.

STRATEGY	RESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATION	DUE DATE
Provide VA leaders, managers, and supervisors with meaningful training that increases their awareness of the business, cultural, demographic, and legal frameworks for understanding and managing diversity. Include such training in leadership development programs and provide training to all employees in an effort to improve their understanding of diversity issues.	VALU	Continuous
Require the development and use of Individual Development Plans for supervisors, managers, executives, and non-supervisory employees.	VALU	Continuous
Develop a Departmentwide profile of knowledge and skill sets that all VA supervisors, managers, and executives (and potential candidates for those positions) must demonstrate along their career progression.	OHRM and VALU	September 2003
Implement an enterprise-wide Learning Management System (LMS) to include all Administrations and Staff Offices.	VALU	September 2003
Expand the Women's Executive Leadership Forum to include women from VA field facilities.	OHRM	December 2003
Analyze VA leadership and supervisory development program content for best fits and identify and evaluate gaps in content.	OHRM and VALU	December 2003
Establish a career-counseling program that addresses the specific needs of women.	VA Human Resources Advisory Council	December 2003
Develop and implement results-oriented mentoring programs that include an evaluation element. Pilot a Departmentwide mentoring program.	VALU	January 2004

GOAL 3: FOSTER A CORPORATE CULTURE THAT PROACTIVELY INTEGRATES WOMEN INTO GS-13, GS-14, GS-15 , AND SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE POSITIONS.

STRATEGY	RESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATION	DUE DATE
Publicize and recognize the accomplishments of women in Government and VA.	Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs	Continuous
Incorporate questions into the Department's annual <i>One VA</i> survey to assess and monitor how women perceive the working environment and barriers to employment, training, and advancement.	OHRM and the Office of Policy, Planning and Preparedness	July 2003
Establish a diversity scorecard for each Administration and Staff Office. Each executive's performance will be measured on the basis of complete organizational data. Performance Review Boards will use this data as one of the criteria in recommending bonuses and pay adjustments to the Secretary.	Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration	September 2003
Tailor EEO data collection processes to differentiate between men, women, and minority complainants. Track claims from women by category.	Office of Resolution Management	March 2004
Conduct national needs assessment on the feasibility of expanding VA's childcare centers' hours of operations to coincide with tours of duty including evenings and weekends.	VHA and VBA	May 2004



STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

VA MISSION: “To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan...” — Abraham Lincoln

CORE VALUES: President Lincoln’s words guide VA today. The men and women of VA are dedicated to fulfilling the department’s mission and vision. We will commit our energy and abilities to continue the rich history of providing for those who have served America. In so doing, we will strive to uphold a set of core values that represent the basic fabric of our organizational culture.

VA ENABLING GOAL 1.5: Deliver world-class service to veterans and their families by applying sound business principles that result in effective management of people, communications, technology, and governance.

“RECRUIT, DEVELOP, AND RETAIN A COMPETENT, COMMITTED, AND DIVERSE WORKFORCE THAT PROVIDES HIGH-QUALITY SERVICE TO VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES.”

GOAL 1: INCREASE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION PROGRAMS DESIGNED TO ATTRACT AND PROMOTE WOMEN.

Strategy A: Develop a robust corporate repository that captures data on applicants for employment, training, and career progression. Use that data and equivalent internal data to monitor and evaluate the selection process to ensure outreach to qualified women candidates.

Performance Measure: By June 2004, corporate repository will be available for use VA-wide.

Strategy B: Partner with professional organizations—including Executive Women in Government, Federally Employed Women, National Association of Female Executives, and others—to enhance VA’s ability to recruit and retain highly skilled and qualified women, and to prepare them to become future VA executives.

Performance Measure: By July 2003, the Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration is to report accomplishment of establishing professional partnering agreements with these organizations.

Strategy C: Ensure that the advancement of women in the Senior Executive Service meets or exceeds the Government average by 2007.

Performance Measure: The Federal Government average for women in SES positions is 24 percent. VA's representation of women in SES positions is only 17.2 percent.

<u>2003</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>
18%	20%	23%	26%	30%

Strategy D: Ensure that women are proportionately represented in high level awards such as bonuses, rank awards, external awards, and special contribution awards.

Performance Measure: By January 2004, each Administration and Staff Office is to submit a plan, which details how incentive award initiatives will be addressed.

Strategy E: Determine the number of leadership position vacancies anticipated during the next 2 years. Through an ongoing focused outreach to women, both within and outside VA, identify ways these positions can be made available to women candidates, either as temporary or permanent assignments.

Performance Measure: Ensure that the Department's Succession Plan incorporates this strategy and provides measures for success.

Strategy F: Finalize a standardized entrance and exit interview process for use throughout VA, with an electronic storage capability to track results. This tool will assess and correct conditions that cause employees to leave VA employment. Entrance interviews would entail a follow-up by Human Resources—after 4 months, 8 months, 1 year, and 3 years—to determine if goals were met.

Performance Measure: By January 2004, OHRM will implement the entrance and exit interview process.

Strategy G: Review, implement, and communicate family-friendly programs.

Performance Measure: By September 2003, publish a brochure listing the various family-friendly programs within the Department. By November 2003, conduct an online survey of family-friendly program needs, and then incorporate questions regarding family-friendly programs into VA's annual *One VA Survey*.

Strategy H: Conduct benchmarking and assess best practices from internal and external programs that will improve the recruitment, employment, and development of women employees.

Performance Measure: Implement the Department's recruitment and marketing plan with associated milestones.

Strategy I: Simplify rules and regulations governing hiring and compensation.

Performance Measure: Work collaboratively with OPM and OMB in obtaining direct hire authority for positions the Department deems critical and hard-to-fill.

GOAL 2: DEVELOP AND ENHANCE EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMS DESIGNED TO ADVANCE WOMEN.

Strategy J: Expand the Women's Executive Leadership Forum to include women from VA field facilities.

Performance Measure: By December 2003, the Office of Human Resources Management will create a Web site and distribute brochures electronically to all VA facilities to highlight the leadership forum and select field employees to participate.

Strategy K: Develop and implement women's mentoring programs that are results oriented and include an evaluation element.

Performance Measure: By January 2004, VALU will pilot a Departmentwide mentoring program along with an evaluation component. The results of this program will be used to formulate continuing mentoring program guidance.

Strategy L: Provide VA leaders, managers, and supervisors with meaningful training that increases their awareness of the business, cultural, demographic, and legal frameworks for understanding and managing diversity. Include this training in leadership development programs. Provide awareness training to all employees to enhance their understanding of diversity issues and reinforce VA's goals for its workforce.

Performance Measure: VALU will provide an action plan that identifies specific training components for managerial and supervisory training and a timeline for accomplishment.

Strategy M: Develop a Departmentwide profile of knowledge and skill sets that every VA supervisor, manager, and executive (or potential candidate for those positions) must demonstrate.

Performance Measure: By September 2003, complete a plan to implement the High Performance Development Model throughout the Department, which will include leadership core competencies. OHRM and VALU have begun working on this.

Strategy N: Analyze VA leadership and supervisory development content for best fits, identify gaps in content, prepare curriculum maps, leverage existing opportunities across the agency, and evaluate decisions for Departmentwide curriculum.

Performance Measure: By September 2003, OHRM and VALU will develop an assessment tool for evaluating the relevance, impact, and capacity of leadership development programs throughout the Department.

Strategy O: Require all Administrations and Staff Offices sponsoring leadership development programs to collect and maintain information that includes specific data on women applicants and participants.

Performance Measure: By July 2003, OHRM (assisted by VALU) will provide specific guidance on data collection requirements for leadership development programs to ensure that consistent data on women applicants and participants is maintained and analyzed.

Strategy P: Establish a career-counseling program that addresses the specific needs of women. Task the Department's Human Resources Advisory Council with providing options to facilities on ways to establish and implement this strategy Departmentwide, with varying levels of human resources (HR) support.

Performance Measure: By December 2003, publish a directive to implement this strategy throughout VA.

Strategy Q: Implement a Departmentwide Learning Management System (LMS) to provide VA with the framework to manage employee training and to leverage learning resources. Eliminate legacy systems by creating a single LMS, which will provide a platform for workforce development, succession planning, and competencies management. The LMS will capture data regarding career development of women in order to plan and achieve workforce diversity within VA's leadership ranks.

Performance Measure: Implement the LMS prototype, to include all the administrations, by September 2003.

Strategy R: Require the development and use of Individual Development Plans (IDPs) for supervisors, managers, and executives. Advocate the development and use of IDPs for all non-supervisory employees.

Performance Measure: Since IDPs will be a functional component of the Learning Management System and strategically linked to performance requirements, each organization is to begin developing IDPs in consultation with VA Learning University or their respective training organizations.

Strategy S: Ensure that financial resources are available—in addition to the VALU and administration training budgets that already exist—to support women’s ongoing education and career development programs.

Performance Measure: By January 2004, OHRM will develop a pilot for the use of Individual Learning Accounts based on an OPM model using women and minorities as initial participants.

GOAL 3: FOSTER A CORPORATE CULTURE THAT PROACTIVELY INTEGRATES WOMEN INTO GS-13, GS-14, GS-15, AND SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE POSITIONS.

Strategy T: To ensure that senior executives are held accountable and responsible—and that they receive recognition for achieving results on the employment and advancement of women—the Performance Review Boards (PRBs) will meet to establish a diversity scorecard for each Administration and Staff Office. Each executive’s performance will be measured on the basis of corporate data. PRBs will use this data as one of their criteria in recommending bonuses and pay adjustments to the Secretary.

Performance Measure: By August 2003, brief each of the four Performance Review Boards on relevant criteria necessary to base diversity decisions. Upon completion, by August 2003, brief the Strategic Management Council to obtain additional guidance. By October 2003, implement the new process.

Strategy U: Incorporate questions in the annual *One VA Survey* to monitor and assess how women perceive the working environment in terms of barriers to employment opportunities, training, and advancement—so that the survey can be used to measure organizational successes and failures.

Performance Measure: By July 2003, the Office of Human Resources and the Office of Policy and Planning will determine the questions and categories.

Strategy V: The Office of Resolution Management (ORM) will tailor Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) data collection processes to differentiate between men, women, and minority complainants and to track claims from women by category.

Performance Measure: By December 2003, ORM will change the functionality of its automated database and associated processes to track this data. By March 2004, ORM will begin collecting and reporting, on a quarterly basis, the data to all senior managers and field facility directors.

Strategy W: Identify ways to publicize and recognize the accomplishment of women in Government and VA.

Performance Measure: Published articles about women in VA will appear in the Vanguard at least four times a year.

Strategy X: Conduct national needs assessment on the feasibility of extending the hours of operation for VA's childcare centers to coincide with tours of duty including evenings and weekends.

Performance Measure: Complete assessment by March 2004 and provide results to the Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration.



SUMMARY

"For the sake of equity and better, fairer, more reflective public policy, the country needs more women participating in government at every level." (NAFE)

Creating an organizational climate that respects and values women is not only the right thing to do, it is a business imperative crucial to VA's success in meeting its strategic goal to deliver and provide world-class service, as well as support the President's Management Agenda for Human Capital. The bottom line is we must not only "talk the talk but walk the walk." VA's core values, particularly respect, teamwork, and integrity, are closely tied to VA's future vision for an organization that values diversity and uses it as a catalyst for teamwork and innovation in achieving its mission.

Additionally, some of the benefits we expect to derive by improving opportunities for women are: ability to attract the best candidates and increased job satisfaction, which translates into lower absenteeism and turnover and higher levels of creativity and performance.

To strengthen VA's commitment to diversity, the Task Force developed enabling goals and specific strategies for success that incorporate management practices necessary to support our beliefs and values regarding the inclusion of women in the senior executive ranks. These strategies will provide the basis for establishing a framework of effective processes and will enable VA to become a workplace of excellence.

Finally, the Department's success or failure in fulfilling its mission will depend on the willingness of each supervisor, manager, and executive to lead with integrity and demonstrate a commitment to an environment that truly recognizes, trains, and promotes women. Only when new levels of responsibility and accountability are achieved will VA move from our current position—last among all of the cabinet level agencies for women above grade GS-13—to a position of leadership in diversity excellence.

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